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AUTHOR Smith, Kyle D.
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ABSTRACT

Moderate amounts of self-disclosure and willingness to let others disclose are considered essential in moving from casual to lasting relationships. Self-disclosure, however, is a private behavior which is seldom observed directly. Television provides a unique opportunity for the observation of otherwise personal behaviors, and may affect viewers' behavioral decisions. To quantify the impact of prosocial, self-disclosing behavioral content in television programming on viewers' self-disclosure responses, 32 college students completed questionnaires on their television and movie viewing habits and on their ease of self-disclosure. Subjects randomly assigned to the experimental condition watched vignettes from popular television programs which exemplified positive other-directed disclosure behavior. Both experimental and control subjects then taped a positive self-disclosing message to their closest same-sex friend and rated their own tapes according to how personal their messages were. Tapes were also rated by three judges. The results indicated that compared to control subjects experimental subjects rated their own tapes as significantly more personal in content. Ratings by judges, however, did not corroborate the self-perceptions of the experimental subjects. These findings suggest that exposure to prosocial self-disclosure in television programing does induce a positive shift in subjects' self-perceptions of subsequent disclosure behavior, although the observer-rated quality of this behavior may not be affected. (NRB)

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Effects of Prosocial Television Programming On Viewer Self-Perceptions

Kyle D. Smith

University of Washington

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Introduction

Social psychological examinations of friendships have focused largely on initial stages of attraction and friendship formation, rather than on the maintenance of ongoing relationships and the exchanges within them. Research has identified a number of personal determinants of attraction and friendship formation, including attitude similarity (Schachter, 1951); perceptions of the other's evaluations of self (Byrne & Rhamey, 1965); reinforcement; and physical attractiveness (Schoedel, Frederickson & Knight, 1975). In addition, several situational determinants of attraction have been identified, including propinquity (Festinger, Schachter & Back, 1950); and misattributed emotional arousal (Veitch & Griffitt, 1977), often in association with romantic attraction. Less is known about the functions, costs and benefits of established friendships long after the initial process of progressive acquaintance has been completed. We may wonder why some friendships last for a lifetime and are counted among an individual's most rewarding of life experiences, while others gradually wane and lose value for both parties. More recent investigations (e.g., Rusbult, 1980; Clark, 1981; Rawlins, 1983) have examined such variables as satisfaction, commitment, comparability of benefits given and received, and negotiation of freedoms within ongoing friendships, with a recognition that what is important in establishing a friendly relationship is not necessarily what remains important in the choice to continue it.

As with so many important aspects of human behavior, the study of friendship presents formidable methodological and ethical challenges to the social scientist, and this may account in part for its relative neglect in psychological literature. The difficulties inherent in achieving systematic observation, much less controlled manipulation, of established, ongoing, and important interpersonal relationships are obvious.

This paper describes a study of exchange processes within ongoing and important friendship relations. A primary purpose of the research has been the development of an experimental methodology for controlled assessment of situational variables in these relationships. This experiment assesses the impact of a single situational variable on the exchange process. Selection of the exchange behavior to be observed is based on a review of the relevant literature, which will now be summarized.

One possible function of friendship is to provide for the individual an opportunity to give and receive confidences, establishing an intimacy of verbal exchange. Sermat and Smyth (1973) reported that, among 300 persons interviewed on the topic of loneliness, individuals of all ages and backgrounds attribute their feelings of loneliness most often to "the lack of opportunity to talk about personal, important matters with someone else (p. 332)." Subsequent research supported these findings with a sample of college undergraduates, and also demonstrated that those who report being most lonely are those who are least effective in making themselves known to another person (Solano, Batten & Parish, 1982). Other research has substantiated the finding that at least moderate amounts of self-disclosure and willingness to let the other disclose are essential in moving from casual to more rewarding and lasting relationships, and are

therefore highly valued (Levin & Gergen, 1969; Cozby, 1972; Worthy, Gary & Kahn, 1969).

Experimental research on self-disclosure has typically involved subjects disclosing to strangers (e.g., Jourard & Landsman, 1960); to the experimenter (Vondracek, 1969); or to a confederate (Ehrlich & Graeven, 1971). Social penetration theory (Taylor, Altman & Sorrentino, 1969; Altman & Taylor, 1973) has emphasized that self-disclosure within the context of an interpersonal relationship is an exchange process, and is affected by past, projected and currently assessed costs and benefits. Yalom (1970) has listed a number of factors involved in determining the risks of self-disclosing. The discloser may be misunderstood, unfavorably judged, rejected or even exploited in unexpected ways by the recipient of the information. Given these very real dangers facing an individual who nonetheless desires to share his thoughts and feelings with another, the question invariably becomes, "How should I go about this?"

Research has supported the notion that an exchange of disclosures is a complex and potentially hazardous process. Altman and Taylor (1973) have noted that disclosure typically begins at shallow and relatively insensitive levels (e.g., one's preferred foods and popular media) to test the waters before proceeding to more intimate and therefore "risky" topics. Other research has emphasized the reciprocal process of disclosure as the individual and partner gradually move from casual to sensitive topics (Levin & Gergen, 1969; Cozby, 1972). If the listener fails to return a sensitive disclosure in kind, this is most frequently interpreted as a sign that the conversation has exceeded the point at which the other feels comfortable. This type of exchange is at best a process of trial and error, and an individual may be highly motivated to draw on all available sources of information in order to maximize gains and minimize potential losses.

Understandably, many individuals may be sufficiently intimidated by the prospect of self-disclosure, whether from past experience or fundamental uncertainties, to avoid plunging feet first into so ambiguous and potentially embarrassing an enterprise without substantive information on contingent risks and benefits. Festinger's (1954) social comparison theory suggests that individuals in ambiguous situations are highly motivated to obtain advance information from similar others on what is acceptable, through feedback and direct observation, if possible. It is here, however, that the nature of self-disclosure provides an interesting problem for both the would-be discloser and the social scientist. Revealing sensitive personal information about one's self is of necessity a private and one-to-one behavior. There are few opportunities to oversee such behavior as a disinterested observer.

Another source of information on probable rewards and punishments from and procedures for effective disclosure may be viewed in television programming and in popular films. While the relative concentration of self-disclosing and other intimacy maintenance behaviors within various types of programming will require in-depth content analyses to determine, it seems apparent that such behavior is probably overrepresented in many types of programming, as compared with real-life incidence. By its very

nature, popular television programming must be absorbing and, to some extent at least, dramatic. We are virtually inundated with "personal glimpses" of fictional characters at highly crucial and emotional phases of their lives. Characters in steady viewers' favorite programs are better known to them and better understood as people than most "real people" with which they have contact. It seems reasonable to question whether exposure to concentrated doses of intimate exchange between close friends and confidants on television day after day, transcends the boundaries of simple entertainment and provides, however unconsciously, a source of information on probable outcomes of personal, real-life decisions. Janis (1980) poses the problem succinctly in suggesting that "the images conveyed by entertainment programs and films shown on television can also induce personal scripts in viewers, some of which may unintentionally affect their personal policies that are carried out time and again for many years, perhaps even for the rest of their lives (pp. 165-166)." Television and popular cinema, then, provide a unique vehicle for the observation of otherwise private and personal behaviors, including self-disclosure, and may in turn affect the viewer's behavioral decisions.

Singer and Singer (1983) have recently called for a more thorough examination of the special medium of television by social scientists. They ask us to consider "whether particular kinds of programming might have constructive possibilities in stimulating imaginativeness, positive emotionality, and greater social or ethical awareness (p.826)." Studies of television have already been moving away from repetitious assessment of the effects of violent television programming on children, and have more recently focused on the effects of other types of programming on prosocial behavior among viewers. A recent study demonstrated that preference for prosocial modes of conflict resolution among high school age youths shows a substantial correlation with the perceived likelihood that the individual's favorite TV character would also resolve the conflict in a prosocial manner (Roloff & Greenberg, 1979). Other research, largely conducted among pre-school and elementary age children, has demonstrated positive changes in incidence of helping responses in the face of distress in others (Sprafkin, Liebert & Poulos, 1975; Baran, Chase & Courtright, 1979); initiation of social contact (O'Connor, 1969; Coates, Pusser & Goodman, 1976); reduction in aggression (Baran, 1974; Bankart & Anderson, 1979); donation behavior and other-reinforcement (Bryan & Walbek, 1970; Coates, Pusser & Goodman, 1976) and adherence to rules (Stein & Bryan, 1972) following exposure to selected installments of prosocial television programs, e.g. Sesame Street, Emergency, Davy and Goliath, Lassie, and Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. Other research has indicated, however, that the influences of preferred program viewing on prosocial behavior may be statistically significant but functionally negligible. Sprafkin and Rubinstein (1979) conducted a field correlational study with 393 grade school children, and found that the average exposures to prosocial content and the prosocial rating of favorite programs each accounted for less than 2% of the variance in a peer-rated prosocial behavior index.

If prosocial behavior is defined as consisting of "a variety of acts such

as helping, aiding, sharing, donating or assisting...seen as having positive social consequences (Bar-Tal, 1976, p.4)," self-disclosure and prosocial behavior may be seen to intermesh in the sharing of positive sentiments with friends and loved ones. Many would agree that it is a good idea to let those for whom one cares know about it occasionally, yet informal observation suggests that such behavior may have a low baseline. In one sense, the failure of many to express verbally their positive feelings for others (a behavior which includes facets of self-disclosure and feedback for the person concerned) is puzzling, since such behavior would generally be rewarded when it occurs. It is possible, however, that the ambiguities and potential hazards inherent in this form of self-disclosure are particularly severe. The person disclosing positive feelings for an important other may be misunderstood, made vulnerable, cause embarrassment on the other's part, or, perhaps worst of all, fail to find these feelings reciprocated. The motivation to engage in social comparison before attempting prosocial self-disclosure should be pronounced, and information on what is "normal" and accepted in such behavior, as conveyed by the popular media, may be correspondingly valued.

It need not be assumed, of course, that the motivation to establish an intimacy of verbal exchange, as noted by Sermat and Smyth (1973), necessarily extends to the disclosure of one's own feelings for the other person. Prosocial self-disclosure may be viewed as appropriate only in specific contexts, and in response to specific needs on the part of one or both persons. If, for example, prosocial self-disclosure often occurs in response to stressors facing the other person, and with the objective of helping the other to deal with the stressors, the act of disclosing may be viewed as one form of social support.

A growing body of literature suggests that the presence of social supports is an important if not vital contributor to adaptation to stressful events (for reviews, see Sarason, 1980; Heller & Swindle, 1983; Leavy, 1983). One of the most frequently cited deficiencies in recent work on social support is the vagueness of the support construct itself. House (1981) has provided an integration of the many conceptualizations, and suggests the following typology. Emotional support involves caring, trust and empathy; instrumental support involves helping others with their work and difficult tasks, as well as offering needed resources such as loans of money; informational support includes teaching a skill or offering information which can provide a solution to a problem; and appraisal support involves information which can be used for evaluating one's personal performance. It should be noted, however, that offers of support may involve several or all of these components, and they may not be viewed as functionally independent. Heller and Swindle (1983) have suggested that one important function of the individual's support network (including family and friends) is to provide resources such as these in the face of stressors. Procidiano and Heller (1983) found that college students with high levels of perceived social support from friends were lower in trait anxiety, and that those with the highest levels of perceived

support also showed the highest rates of self-disclosure to friends and family. Relatively few investigations have studied social support in the context of active interpersonal exchange (e.g., Clark, 1981; Rawlins, 1983), and it is to this deficiency that a portion of the research reported in this paper has been addressed.

The experiment reported in this paper attempted to quantify the impact of prosocial, self-disclosing behavioral content in television programming on a college-age sample's self-disclosure responses. The research had as a secondary objective the development of a technique for assessing exchange behaviors within actual, established friendships.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 32 University of Washington undergraduates, 12 males and 20 females, who received psychology course credit for their participation in an experiment entitled "Friendship Interactions." Subjects were recruited by telephone after having completed a one-page questionnaire from the research group during an hour-long mass testing session.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire utilized during mass testing was preceded by a consent form with the heading "Friendship and Entertainment Questionnaire". The inventory began with a number of questions concerning the respondent's television viewing habits in terms of hours and types of programming preferred, along with similar questions on viewing theatrical films. This page concluded with a set of seemingly unrelated questions about the respondent's ease of self-disclosure on seven topics: personal successes and achievements; interests and hobbies; thoughts and feelings about family and loved ones ; positive feelings (love, praise, expressions of attachment) with regard to the person addressed; negative feelings (grievances, serious differences of opinion, etc.) with regard to the person addressed; the respondent's own strengths; the respondent's own weaknesses. The respondent was asked to rate subjective difficulty of self-disclosure on a 10-point scale, with 1 = "no difficulty whatsoever", and 10 indicating that the topic in question was either "extremely difficult or even impossible" to discuss. Respondents interested in experimental participation for course extra credit were encouraged to provide their names and phone numbers at the bottom of the questionnaire. Less than 10% of respondents declined to provide this information. Risks of sensitization to experimental hypotheses by prior exposure to this questionnaire were considered minimal in view of the fact that each respondent had filled out a variety of unrelated questionnaires in the same testing session, and in fact, many respondents indicated that they did not remember the subject matter of the questionnaire(s) for which they had provided their names and telephone numbers.

For subjects agreeing to participate in the experiment (approximately 90% of those contacted), the questionnaire item on the sharing of positive

feelings provided a basis for the covariate required for a randomized block design. Based on their responses, subjects were categorized as occupying one of five blocks covering the range of responses to this item (1 to 10). Since pilot testing of the procedure had indicated that some subjects in the fifth (least disclosing) block found the experimental procedure distressing, eight subjects from each of the first four blocks only were recruited for the experiment. Once identified, subjects within blocks were randomly assigned to treatment conditions prior to participation in the experiment.

Apparatus and Procedure

On arrival at the laboratory, subjects were asked to be seated in front of a 21" monitor connected to a Sony 3/4" videocassette player. The monitor was placed approximately 4 feet from the seated subject, with the screen slightly above eye level. The experimenter recorded the subject's credit, and then gave one of two descriptions of the procedure to be followed, depending on the experimental condition to which the subject had been assigned. Subjects in the experimental condition were informed that they would be asked to watch a brief videotaped program at the outset of the session, while subjects in the control group were not requested to watch such a program. The text of the procedural description follows, with sections varying across treatment groups in italics.

> Today's study will consist of *three/two* parts. (Subjects in the experimental group next received the following instructions: *In the first part, you will be asked to watch a taped program which will not last more than fifteen minutes. Since one of the things we are interested in learning is how people evaluate the behavior of others and themselves, you will be asked to rate this program on several written scales in the third part of the study. With this in mind, we ask that you pay close attention to the program so that you will be able to answer the questions on our questionnaire.*) In the *second/first* part of the study, you will be asked to tape a short message (*of your own*) which you will (*also*) rate on *a/the* questionnaire. The *third/second* part of the study will simply consist of filling out the questionnaire.

The experimenter advised the subject of his or her rights as a participant, and offered the subject a consent form prior to initiating the procedure. After the subject had authorized participation, the experimenter instructed experimental subjects to relax and devote their attention to the taped program, which the experimenter then started. The program consisted of one to three-minute vignettes from a variety of popular programs, including Fame, T.J. Hooker, All My Children, As the World Turns, and M*A*S*H*, and lasted a total of fifteen minutes. All of the vignettes had been selected from programming broadcast over the previous month as exemplifying positive other-directed disclosure behavior.

Following exposure to the taped series of vignettes, the subject was given the following instructions:

Now we come to the second part of the study. What I would like you to do is to think of the one person who is the same sex as yourself whom you consider to be your best or closest friend. We also ask that the person you are thinking of be someone who lives in this area. Do you have one person in mind?

The experimenter would proceed only after the subject indicated thinking of one such person in particular. If the subject had no close friends of the same sex and/or in the vicinity, he or she was encouraged to think of the person of the same sex and in the general vicinity that he or she liked the most even if this person was not necessarily considered a "close" friend.

What we are asking you to do is to record a message to this person. What you say will remain completely confidential unless you specifically authorize our showing the tape to someone not directly connected with the experiment. Now, you are asked to think of something positive, something good about your relationship with your friend. Try to make it something that you haven't told them before, or that you've said very rarely. An example would be some reason or reasons why you feel good about your friend as a person, or what makes them special. Another example would be something that they have said or done that you remember and why it makes you feel good about them. Do you have something in mind about your relationship with your friend that is positive and that you haven't said to them before?

The experimenter would proceed only when the subject indicated that he or she had something in mind to discuss while being videotaped. If after a few moments any subject felt that he or she would be unable to think of anything to say, that subject was excused from further participation in the experiment. Two subjects were excused for this reason. The subject was informed that the person serving as his or her experimenter would not see the videotaped message that he or she was about to record, nor would anyone else without the subject's expressed written permission. The subject was also informed that he or she would not be identified on the tape in any way other than by a subject number visible to the camera (this number had been written on a blackboard behind the subject). After the subject indicated understanding the instructions and his or her rights as a participant, the experimenter proceeded with the final set of instructions:

I would like you to record a message to your friend. I will leave the room for five minutes, during which time I would like you to face the camera and imagine that you are talking to your friend. After you have made this tape, I will ask you whether or not you would be willing to let your friend actually see your taped message. Imagine that he or she can hear you and see you while you are talking. Tell him/her about the positive aspect of your relationship that you've decided to

talk about. While you are talking, try to imagine how your friend would react to what you're saying. You'll have five minutes to complete what you have to say. I'll come back in after five minutes, or, if you finish before that time, press the STOP button (indicates) on the recorder and step outside the room to let me know that you're finished. Please don't touch any of the equipment with the exception of the recorder STOP button if you want to use it. Do you understand the procedure?

When the subject indicated readiness, the experimenter switched on the camera, deactivated the monitor, inserted the "subject messages" videocassette into the recorder and started the recording before leaving the room. The experimenter waited outside the laboratory until called or until five minutes had elapsed, at which time he or she reentered the room, stopped the recorder and offered the subject a release form by which he or she could grant access to the tape for purposes of data collection to those persons named on the form and directly connected to the experiment. If the subject refused to grant access, the recording would be erased immediately. Only one subject refused to grant access to the tape. The experimenter then offered the subject a short questionnaire containing several dependent measures. After completion of this questionnaire, the subject was debriefed.

Dependent Measures

Several different types of dependent measures were obtained.

Self-report (questionnaire) data. Subjects reported on the extent to which they were relaxed or nervous during each of the preceding stages of the experiment, with ratings indicated at any one of seven points on a continuum labelled "personal" and "impersonal (casual)" at opposite poles. Subjects also rated the content of their own taped messages as personal or impersonal, and whether or not the friend concerned would find the message interesting, on seven-point scales. Subjects were asked whether they had ever said most or all of these things previously to the friend concerned. Finally, subjects rated their subjective experience of anxiety, if any, during the taping procedure, by responding to a self-descriptive semantic differential item labelled "nervous" and "relaxed" at the poles.

Behavioroid data. Subjects were asked whether or not they would be willing to actually let the friend concerned see and hear the taped message. (There was no indication at this point that such a request would not be made at some point in the procedure.)

Ratings of subject messages. Subject messages were rated by three judges according to the degree of self-disclosure evidenced, the quality of the message as personal or impersonal (casual), and the degree to which the subject appeared to be anxious while making the tape. These ratings were then averaged over the three judges for each subject.

Results

Self-report Measures

Responses to items on the post-experimental questionnaire were subjected to a multivariate analysis of variance for a randomized blocks design. Since both blocks and treatments were regarded as fixed, the estimate of experimental error for all tests to which MANOVA was applicable was the within-cell mean square. Based on the results of pilot testing, treatment main effects were predicted for self-ratings of message content as personal or impersonal and anxiety experienced during the taping session. All tests were two-tailed. Also, it was observed among pilot subjects that treatment effects were least pronounced for those in blocks comprised of less self-disclosing respondents. For this reason, a block x treatment interaction was predicted for the treatment effect on self-ratings of message content as personal or impersonal.

Two additional dependent measures were obtained in the post-experimental questionnaire: the subject's reported willingness to allow the friend concerned to see the taped message (yes/no), and the subject's self-report of whether the message content had been previously disclosed (yes/no). Treatment main effects for these variables were assessed via the binomial distribution.

Table 1 summarizes the analysis of variance for all interval scale self-reported dependent measures. There were two significant main effects: one for blocks, and one for treatments on self-ratings of message content as personal or impersonal, $F(1, 24) = 8.10$, $p = .005$. Subjects who had been exposed to the videotaped series of vignettes rated their own taped messages as significantly more personal in content than did subjects in the control group. No other main effects approached significance.

Table 1
Results of Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Interval Scale Self-Reported Dependent Measures

Dependent Variable	$\bar{X}_{treatment}$	$\bar{X}_{control}$	F ratio
Self-rating of message content:			
Personal/Impersonal(casual)	2.064	.875	8.10**
Difficult/Easy	1.313	.438	<1
Block x treatment interaction			
Personal/Impersonal(casual)	---	---	2.49*
Self-rating of anxiety	1.250	.417	2.02

Note. All tests for main effects have $df = 1, 24$. The test for the block x treatment interaction has $df = 3, 24$. The range of possible scale values is from -3 to 3.
*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$

The predicted block x treatment interaction for self-ratings of message content as personal or impersonal was also significant, $F(3, 24) = 3.38$, $p < .05$. As can be seen in Table 2, subjects in the third block showed significantly greater increases in ratings of message content as personal than those shown by the first and second (most disclosing) blocks, while subjects in the fourth (least disclosing) block showed a slight, nonsignificant decrease.

Table 2
Cell Means for Block x Treatment Interaction for Self-Ratings of Message Content

Block	Condition	
	Treatment	Control
1	2.75	2.00
2	2.25	0.50
3	2.50	-0.50
4	1.00	0.75

Note. $n = 4$/cell. The range of possible scale values is from -3 to 3.

Although significance tests for the remaining self-report variables failed to detect any main effects, there is one qualification of this finding. It was observed that if the analysis is restricted to the three blocks representing subjects who report low to moderate difficulty in generating prosocial self-disclosure as measured on the pretest, an effect for treatments on the self-report of whether the content of the taped message had been previously disclosed is observed, $b(9; 12, .33)$, $p = .006$. Table 3 summarizes data for this variable and for willingness to allow the friend to see the taped message.

Table 3
Results of Analysis for Dichotomous Self-Reported Dependent Measures Using the Binomial Approximation to the Chi-Square Distribution

Effect	Condition	n (saying Yes)	n (saying No)	p
Had previously disclosed message content	Treatment	9	3	.006
	Control	4	8	---
Willing to let friend see the message	Treatment	11	1	.253
	Control	9	3	---

Note. Range restricted to blocks 1 through 3.

Effect	Condition	n (saying Yes)	n (saying No)	p
Had previously disclosed message content	Treatment	9	7	.238
	Control	6	10	---
Willing to let friend see the message	Treatment	14	2	.818
	Control	13	3	---

Note. Range includes all blocks (1 through 4).

Surprisingly, those subjects who had seen the collection of videotaped vignettes were more likely to report that they had previously said to the friend concerned most or all of what was recorded in their own message, as Table 3 demonstrates. Of additional interest is the fact that this self-perception suggests a violation of instructions to the subject to discuss something previously undisclosed.

Observer Ratings of Subject Messages

Mean ratings of taped messages by three judges, blind to experimental condition, were computed for each subject, and included in the MANOVA procedure. It was predicted that subjects exposed to the series of vignettes would produce messages that would be rated as having more personal and intimate content than that of controls; that experimental subjects would appear less anxious on tape; and that experimental subjects would evidence fewer pauses of greater than three seconds. A block by treatment interaction was also predicted for observer ratings of message

content as personal or impersonal. Of these, only two effects approached significance. Subjects in the treatment group were judged less anxious than controls: F (1, 17) = 3.22, $p < .10$; and the block by treatment interaction for ratings of message content as personal or impersonal also approached but did not attain significance: F(3, 17) = 2.49, $p < .10$. The treatment main effect for observer ratings of message content did not approach significance, indicating that the self-perceptions of film-exposed subjects were not corroborated by observers. Table 4 summarizes the multivariate tests for all observer-rated dependent measures.

Table 4
Results of Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Observer-Rated Dependent Measures

Dependent Variable	$\bar{X}_{treatment}$	$\bar{X}_{control}$	F ratio
Number of pauses longer than three seconds	2.23	0.72	<1
Anxiety	3.19	4.06	3.22ns
Rating of message content personal/impersonal	4.28	3.85	<1
Block x treatment interaction: ratings of message content as personal/impersonal	---	---	2.49ns

Note. All tests of main effects have df = 1, 17. The test for the block x treatment interaction has df = 3, 17. The number of pauses exhibited by subjects ranged from 1 to 7. Scale values for the anxiety and personal/impersonal ratings ranged from 1 to 7. Reliability estimates from analysis of variance for repeated measures: number of pauses, alpha = .952; anxiety, alpha = .732; rating of message content as personal/impersonal, alpha = .682.

Discussion

Evaluation of Treatment Effects

The results of Experiment 1 suggest that exposure to prosocial self-disclosure in television programming induced a positive shift in subjects' self-perceptions of subsequent disclosure behavior, if not on the observer-rated quality of the behavior itself. While previous studies (e.g., Sprafkin & Rubinstein, 1979; Burleson, 1982) have incorporated observer ratings of subjects' prosocial behavior, none have directly assessed subjects' self-perceptions on the same rating continuua. Although this finding lends itself to several possible interpretations, each must take into account the supplementary finding that judges were unable to corroborate the self-perceptions of the experimental subjects.

One interpretation is that watching the taped series of vignettes made salient the topic of prosocial self-disclosure for experimental subjects. When placed in a similar situation by the next step in the procedure, subjects may have been led to evaluate themselves in comparison with others on the dimension of prosocial disclosive behavior. The ensuing outcome assigned to prosocial self-disclosure in the behavioral "script" represented by the taped vignettes appears to be a predominantly positive one. Predictably, and in line with one aspect of Greenwald's (1980) "totalitarian ego", subjects may have been motivated to perceive themselves as the cause of good outcomes, and hence, to perceive their own behavior in the experiment as more in line with what they had come to see as socially desirable. It is quite conceivable that this enhancement of specific self-perceptions, as a function of the salience of the target behavior, occurred irrespective of any actual "improvement" in disclosure. This explanation is consistent with the post hoc finding that experimental subjects were more likely to state that they had previously said most or all of what they recorded to the friend concerned, in violation of instructions from the experimenter.

A competing explanation suggests a contrast effect. The experimental treatment tape included segments from a variety of programs, including soap operas, situation comedies and prime-time drama. Critics of the popular media, including television, have consistently alleged a lack of realism, dramatic quality and sophistication in such programs (Gann, 1978). It is possible that experimental subjects made use of the tape just witnessed as a metron against which to assess their own performance, and, perhaps justifiably, found their own disclosures to same-sex friends to be of a more genuinely personal, emotional and intimate nature. Control subjects, lacking any such referent, could not shine by comparison and therefore rated their own performances at more unassuming levels.

A third possibility, of course, is that the subjects were actually correct in their self-perceptions, and that experimental subjects had in fact delivered messages of a more revealing and personal nature during the recording task. The discrepancy in this scenario would lie with the judges themselves. One possibility is that the observers were unable to gauge accurately what consitituted a personal revelation for a given subject. The relatively low interrater reliability found for judges on the "message quality" item lends some support to this notion. Although it is possible that what consitutes a highly sensitive topic for a given individual may be far less sensitive for many others, Taylor and Altman (1966) have found high degrees of interrater agreement in scaling statements on a wide variety of personal topics for intimacy of content. Individual differences in intimacy levels assigned to given disclosure topics, then, would be unlikely to negate in isolation a treatment effect, and a more likely explanation is that the number of judges employed in the present study was insufficient to achieve satisfactory reliability.

A final possible interpretation is that the effect is due at least in part to uncontrolled differences in the treatment groups. Experimental subjects, having been in the laboratory for some twenty minutes longer than the controls and having just completed a relatively pleasant "rating task", may have been less anxious than control subjects, who were asked to deliver a

personal message to an imposing video camera within minutes of entering the laboratory. Experimental subjects could therefore have been more likely to feel that their tapes were "personal" in nature, i.e., that they had been successful on the task. Such an explanation, however, would be hard to reconcile with the fact that neither subjective nor objective ratings of anxiety (including the observer count in pauses greater than three seconds in each message) evidenced a treatment effect.

The block x treatment interaction observed for subjects on the self-ratings of message content as personal or impersonal is less readily interpretable. One possibility is that experimental subjects in the third block, more characteristically restricted in their real-life disclosure behavior than first or second-block subjects, used the experimental exercise as an opportunity to "get something off their chests." This explanation is consistent with several comments by subjects offered in response to open-ended items on the postexperimental questionnaire. Subjects in the the fourth block, however, may have found the experience of disclosure sufficiently intimidating to negate any treatment effects.

The hypothesis that experimental subjects would be less anxious while delivering their messages, in that they would feel better prepared for the task and that the behavior would seem more natural and sanctioned, was not supported. Nor did experimental subjects report less "difficulty" in making their tapes on that measure (this item evidenced a Pearson correlation of .67 with the anxiety self-report measure). One possibility is that the experience of speaking to a video camera itself generated anxiety enough to obscure any differences resulting from treatments. The moderate levels of anxiety reported by subjects in both treatment groups lend some support to this interpretation. It is possible, however, that while television and other vehicles for social comparison make proper modes of action and reaction more apparent, they do not actually reduce the trepidation involved in carrying out completed decisions.

Finally, no differences due to treatments were observed in the proportion of subjects willing to actually allow the friends concerned to see their recorded messages. It was originally seen as likely that subjects who felt most satisfied with their messages (and who in turn were more likely to have been in the experimental group) would also be more likely to authorize showing the tape to the friend concerned. However, a high percentage of both groups agreed to let the hypothetical recipient of the tape view it if the experimenter requested this. It is also interesting to note, however, that when offered the <u>option</u> of showing the tape to the friend concerned should the subject wish it (this occurred during the debriefing session, and the experimenter did not attempt to sway the subject's decision in any way), only three subjects expressed a desire to arrange a showing of their taped message for the friend concerned. Of these, none actually made any subsequent contact with the research group to follow through on their request, as they had been told would be necessary. This indicates that the high rate of expressed willingness to show the tape to the friend concerned is probably due at least in part to a genuine willingness to cooperate with the experimenter rather than any desire to complete the disclosure.

<u>Evaluation of Methodology</u>

The technique of requesting that subjects record messages to specific and real persons in experimental settings, allowing the subject to retain control over the disposition of the message, appears to have both practicality and some significant advantages over previously employed strategies for the study of self-disclosure. Pilot testing of the procedure prior to Experiment 1 had demonstrated that all but the least disclosing of subjects (those who had given a response indicating maximum difficulty of prosocial self-disclosure on the pretest) were able to complete the recording task. Many subjects commented that they had found the procedure both absorbing and enjoyable, and felt that having the opportunity to think about and discuss their friendship in concrete terms would have real benefits for the relationship. Ethical considerations are satisfied in that no subject is actually requested to let the friend concerned see the taped message, and the subject is given an opportunity to deny the researcher access to the recording.

Strategic advantages of the procedure include a substantial increase in experimental realism and a qualified increase in mundane realism, in that the subject is actually speaking with the objective of creating a message that could hypothetically be meaningful for a specific person, with whom that subject has a continuing and important relationship. Given a research interest in established friendships, the reasons for preferring this method over disclosures to the experimenter, confederates or strangers are apparent. However, the aforementioned gains in experimental and mundane realism are, obviously, at the expense of another aspect of mundane realism: that the subject is speaking to an unresponsive and imposing camera rather than to a reactive partner. A number of subjects commented on the awkwardness of this aspect of the procedure, underscoring a need for some alterations in the recording procedure.

Comments from subjects during the debriefing sessions also expressed some difficulty in generating prosocial disclosures "in a vacuum," without any specific context or subject matter for the tape. This observation provides an additional interpretation for the relatively low baseline of prosocial self-disclosures, i.e., that such behavior perhaps occurs only in response to acute and clearly delineated needs.

It seems reasonable to consider alterations in the experimental treatments as well. The control procedure was not entirely satisfactory, in that control subjects did not have the experience of watching <u>any</u> film prior to the recording task. Previous studies (e.g., Sprafkin, Liebert & Poulos, 1975; Collins & Getz, 1976) have used films devoid of target prosocial behaviors or films characterized by aggressive, antisocial content as control conditions. Incorporating both of these conditions would be desirable in subsequent experiments.

<u>Directions for Future Research</u>

The next phase of research (beyond replication under more rigorous controls) would be to explore the generality of the self-perceptual shifts in response to media presentations observed in this study. It may be that such presentations produce self-perceptual shifts of far greater magnitude than, and irrespective of, actual behavioral shifts. Viewers may come to evaluate themselves positively on the behavioral dimensions salient to and

apparent in the programs they watch, with the result that the viewers expect others to react to them on the basis of behaviors that do not exist. One way to assess the generality of such effects would be to conduct content analyses of various types of popular programming, and then to supply inventories of self-descriptive items relating the behaviors promoted in such programs to steady viewers. Peers and acquaintances of the viewers should also submit their ratings of the viewer on these same dimensions. We may predict that steady viewers of the programs under study will evaluate themselves more favorably on program-salient behavioral dimensions than will others rating them on these same criteria. Experimental research can supplement correlational studies like the above by exploring the relative contributions of the concentration of target behaviors in particular programs, empathy for and identification with characters, and the variety of target behaviors, in producing self-perceptual shifts among viewers.

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